

The Miles Ahead

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Muncie, Indiana

May 2016

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2016

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Abstract:

As a teenager obsessed with music, I would have loved to read a novel about band members. During college, I finally decided to close that gap in young adult literature. For this thesis, I finished a series I have been working on since freshman year about a girl and all her adventures with her brother's band. I wrote the novel for teenagers to not only enjoy, but to gain something from. I wanted teenagers to take away something from my novel while also enjoying the fantasy of hanging out with their favorite band.

Acknowledgements:

-I would like to thank Angela Jackson-Brown for helping me throughout the semester. She was able to jump into a story that was already being told and help me create something I am really proud of.

Works Cited

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Author's Statement

During my freshman year of college, I read a novel called *The Year I Turned Sixteen* by Diane Schwemm that had four separate stories told by four sisters. Each story was told in the point of view of one of the sisters. While each story had a different plot, the characters stayed the same throughout the entire novel. I liked the idea of combining four novels into one and wanted to try it out myself. My goal was to have these stories that could fit into one book, but maybe stand by themselves too.

At the time, I was obsessed with going to concerts and following my favorite bands on websites like Twitter. So naturally, I wanted to write all about music. I could not find a lot of young adult novels that told a story about the bands that I loved so I thought writing a series about band members would be a great way to fill a gap in young adult literature. Most teenagers are obsessed with music. By giving them novels about band members, they could find another way to enjoy music. I would have loved to have a novel about pop punk bands when I was a teenager. I wanted them to be able to read about a world they were not really allowed in. When I was a teenager, I was obsessed with going to concerts, and I always wished that I could hang out with one of my favorite bands for a day during tour. Band members fascinated me. I wanted to write a series that gives readers the opportunity to go inside the world of bands for a little while.

Just like the "What", the "Where" was not hard to figure out. I always knew that I wanted the novel to be in a little suburb I created called Westerbush. It's about a twenty-

minute drive to Chicago and right by Lake Michigan. I picked a made up Chicago suburb because I grew up in the suburbs, but I did not want to write about my own town. I like writing about topics and places that are familiar to me because it makes the story more realistic. But, I did not want to make the suburb so realistic that people would be able to figure out that I was talking about my hometown. Because of that, I created my own suburb called Westerbush that I could use. It's a lot closer to Chicago and a little smaller than my suburb. Also, I created this town with the thought that I could use it for another story one day. My favorite young adult author, Sarah Dessen, uses the same two made-up towns in all thirteen of her books. Characters from other novels will appear in different stories because they all live in the same town. I always found that so clever and fun. As a reader, I would look closely to try and spot a character from a different novel. By creating Westerbush, I gave myself the opportunity to do what Sarah Dessen did with her towns.

When I finally started to think about the plot of my series, my thoughts centered around a girl named Holland Dawson. She wasn't in a band, but she hung around with a lot of bands. In book one, she is seventeen and a junior in high school. I didn't put her in a band for a reason. More than likely, my audience—which I assumed would be young adult girls—would not be in a band that toured the country; but that would not stop them from imagining what it would be like to go on tour with their favorite band. By having Holland do just that, my readers would be able to live through Holland's experiences. They would be able to *be* Holland for just a little while.

Once I had created Holland, I needed to figure out how she was part of the music world. That's where Montgomery came along. He's Holland's older brother and the lead singer of Midnight Confessions, a punk pop band that's still starting out. Midnight

Confessions consists of Montgomery (vocals), Satchel Ryers (bass), Graham Ashworth (guitar), and Jay Newell (drums). The band had met in middle school and created a band once in high school. Book one starts with the band members being around nineteen and twenty.

Since Midnight Confessions is still trying to get their name out in the music world, they have The Papercut Project to help them out. The Papercut Project is a lot more experienced than Midnight Confessions and takes the band under their wings. The band has five members: Nate Clifford (vocals), Kai Diaz (bass), Owen Diaz (guitar), Aidan Newman (guitar), and Lily Styles (drums). They live in Arizona, around the Scottsdale area, but go on tour and visit Chicago at least once in each novel. While I created all the characters, The Papercut Project was based off of my favorite band at the time, The Summer Set. Their band is very diverse and had certain characteristics that I wanted for The Papercut Project. The Summer Set not only has brothers, Stephen and John Gomez, and one girl, Jess Bowen, they also are not all white. Stephen and John are half Mexican and Jess is Pilipino. I wanted them as an example for at least one of the bands in my novels. For part one, they are between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two.

I knew from the beginning that I wanted Holland and Kai to fall in love. There's no real explanation for it other than I just wanted that to happen. I did not want the love story to overshadow everything else in the series, though, so I wanted it to be subtle. From my experience, it seems that all young adult novels have to have a love story. The main character always finds a boy that helps her through whatever she's going through. While sometimes love stories can be overdone, I do enjoy a few love stories. Because of that, I wanted to make this love story a little deeper. I wanted Holland to be obsessed with love.

and never be able separate who loves her with who just wants to use her. Throughout the novels, she accidentally keeps falling for the wrong guys just because she gives her the attention. Kai is always there to protect her, but Holland does not realize that he is showing genuine care for her. She thinks of him as an older brother instead of someone who could show her what love is, and give her the attention that she keeps searching for. It's not until the last novel that Holland finally understands what she deserves and realizes that Kai has always been there for her. With this love story, I think young girls would be able to learn from Holland. They would be able to see all the mistakes that Holland makes throughout her dating life and hopefully realize what kind of guy they deserve.

Once I had the two main bands and Holland, I started creating a few more minor characters. Farrah Dawson is Montgomery and Holland's mother. She is a single mother and works in the city as a therapist. I created Farrah to be somewhat of a wise figure for Holland and Montgomery. The three of them are very close, and they often go to Farrah to ask for advice. She's a very strong woman, but at the same time is emotional when her children start to grow up. She's very caring and always opens her house to friends in need.

Throughout the entire series, Mr. Dawson is never mentioned. I did this on purpose. So many novels—and even television shows—give an explanation on why a parental figure is missing; sometimes it even becomes a plot point in the story. I didn't want to do that. I wanted Holland and Montgomery's father to be completely out of the picture. They don't talk about him because they just don't care about him. Readers can come to their own conclusion about what happened to Mr. Dawson. For my own personal story, I imagine that he left Farrah to take care of their two kids and Farrah never heard from him again.

Carson Daugherty is Holland's best friend. Her parents, especially her mother, are very strict and want her to be perfect. Whenever she does something wrong, she gets punished for it. Because of that, Farrah becomes more of a mother to her than her own mother. In book one, Carson is more of a side character. Readers don't get to see any passages from her point of view. She's just Holland's best friend. As the series went on, I started to develop Carson's character more. I wanted to make her more than just Holland's best friend.

Once I had all of my characters, I started to think about the plot. As a writer, I prefer to write in the third person, past tense. Along with that, I wanted to write it like Jodi Picoult and have multiple points of views and multiple subplots happening at the same time. By having many points of views, I would have more flexibility in the scenes that I wrote. I did not have to have one specific character always be there. If there was a scene I wanted to show that Holland would not normally be in, I could write that with a different point of view. Along with that, I could give more character their own stories. I knew that I wanted a story from Holland's perspective. Being about the age of Holland at the time, her point of view was going to be the easiest one to do. I also wanted at least one character from each band, so that everyone could be represented. I started with Montgomery and Nate, although sometimes I wrote in other characters points of view—like Owen, Aidan, and Satchel.

My idea that I was going to create a few novellas that could combine to become one novel quickly changed into multiple novels that would definitely be too long to go together. I couldn't hold back all of the ideas that I had and the page length became larger and larger. Each story would have to be its own novel. That didn't bother me, though. I liked the world

that I created and wanted to see how far I could take it. Soon enough, I had enough ideas for six novels.

I wanted the seventh novel in the series to be for my honors thesis because I wanted it to represent the ending to a chapter in my life. I started this series when I was a freshman in high school; it seemed right to end my senior year with the series that took me all of college to write. The seventh novel was the first novel that I had someone read while I was writing it. Some of my friends had read the first couple of novels, but I knew writing the seventh one for my honors thesis was going to be a lot different. This semester, I learned so much more than I did writing the other novels. The scenes in the seventh novel are stronger and more conflict-driven than anything I have written before.

Even though I did not finish the seventh novel for my honors thesis, I know that it is the strongest novel that I have written for this series. It has been four years since I started the series, and I can tell just how much I have learned throughout my four years at Ball State. The first novel in the series has too many storylines going on throughout, while the seventh novel only has three and they connect a lot more than the first few novels. Along with that, I took a lot more time with the seventh one so that I could sort out through what I wanted this story to be about. A lot of times while I am writing a story, I throw everything onto a page without really thinking about it. Now during proofreading, I can understand what I should keep and what would hurt the story if I kept it in; but when I first started writing this series, I was not able to distinguish between the two.

While writing the seventh novel this semester, I took my time and really sorted through what I should add in. I decided to only write through three points of views—Nate, Holland, and Carson—instead of at least six like I did in the other books. I knew that

narrowing the amount of people would help readers, especially those that read the novels out of order. In too much of my writing I will introduce too many characters at one time. That can be overwhelming for readers. I knew I still wanted more than one view, but too many can hurt the novel more than help it. I was glad that I was able to figure out how many points of views were the right amount to really help my novel along.

Even though I was excited about what I wanted to write, I found myself not very eager to write it at times. Normally, I love writing for fun; but knowing that I had to write this for my thesis made me not want to do it. For some reason, writing it seemed like a chore. This is a fatal flaw that I am aware of and know that I need to stop. Whenever I have to do something for a class or work—no matter how excited I am about it—I automatically do not want to do it anymore. With this novel, I would stall with writing the next chapter; but once I started, I was lost in the writing that I loved. It only took a little nudge for me to remember why I loved writing. It was not until this semester that I realized just how bad it was, and I worried that it was going to affect getting a job in writing. The last thing I wanted was for me to loose interest in writing because I *had* to do it. Luckily, every time I pushed myself to write again, I ended up loving what I had. And if I didn't, I at least had the skills and resources to figure out how to change it.

As I was writing the seventh novel, I started thinking about the previous five more than I have in the past four years. I always knew that they were not as good as writing I have produced in the past year or two; but I did not realize until I started working on my thesis just how much work it would take to make the first five novels presentable. The more I thought about it, the more I wondered if it was even worth it to try and edit them. Did I want to try and publish this series? Or did I want to make it something I did in college

and keep it to myself? I went back and forth with these ideas throughout the entire semester. Once I finished with the passage that I am using for my thesis, I knew what I wanted to do. There are so many stories in the six novels—or partial novels—that I have written throughout college; too much to keep in just one series. This series helped me become the writer that I am today. They are the first novels that I have started and actually finished. I could not just keep that to myself. Instead, I want to take the stories that I wrote about in this series and make them their own separate novels. There are a lot of stories that would be a lot stronger if they were the center of attention instead of just one plot surrounded my many. While this may mean that my characters might change, I want to treat this series as the template to help me become the author that I want to be. When I first started this series, I wanted to write fun stories; but now, I want to write stories that teenagers can really take something away from. This series would not work as a whole anymore because I was a completely different writer when I started this first novel, but I do not want all my hard work to go to waste. I may not use all of the plot points that I wrote about in my series, but it is nice to have some options when it comes to writing. This series taught me a lot about what it means to be a writer. I learned how to write scenes that really matter and when to back away from getting into a character's mind. I also learned a little bit about myself and what kind of writer I want to be seen as. I definitely have the confidence and skills to leave college and start my journey in becoming a young adult author.

Series Summaries

Book One

Holland and Carson are starting their junior year of high school together. They meet a boy named Wylee who is their friend's, Matalin, boyfriend. Not long after they met Wylee, he starts flirting with Holland. At first, she ignores it but it becomes hard after a while. In October, Matalin has a birthday party and Wylee asks Holland for a ride and she realizes that he's not that horrible of a person. He's funny and smart, despite his love for drugs. After that night, she starts to like him even though he's dating her friend. One day, Wylee gets upset at Matalin and goes to Holland to vent about Matalin. They end up making out in Holland's car, even though he is still dating Matalin. Once they realize what happened, they decide to keep it a secret. Eventually, Matalin finds a text from Holland and assumes Wylee is cheating on her. Then she confronts Holland and Wylee about it. Holland tries to explain what happened, but Matalin doesn't want to hear about it. She immediately stops talking to both of them. Afterwards, Wylee still wants to be friends with Holland; but she doesn't want to see him anymore. She knows that what she did was wrong and she needs to move past it. Since I wanted to make Holland fall for all the wrong guys in her search for real love, I thought this was the perfect plot to write for her. A lot of girls fall for the "bad boy" and/or kiss their friend's boyfriend. This is a story that readers can relate to, and maybe learn just how to deal with the situation if they ever find something similar to Holland's.

Meanwhile, Midnight Confessions has just come back from an end-of-summer tour and they have nothing to do. After Halloween, Midnight Confessions decides to go back on tour. After their first concert, Montgomery meets a girl outside named Tory. A few tour

dates later, Montgomery spots the girl again. He found that a little strange, knowing that she had to have been following him. They were about three states away from where he saw her last. Montgomery starts seeing her at all the concerts and they quickly develop a relationship. They start hooking up after each of the shows. Toward the end of their tour, Midnight Confessions meets up with The Papercut Project on their Arizona date. Of course, Tory is there too. It's Nate's (from The Papercut Project) twenty-first birthday so they decide to go out after their concert. Montgomery is driving their van and Tory is sitting in the passenger seat. Toward the end of the night, Tory gets pretty drunk and starts an argument. Tory grabs the wheel from Montgomery's hand to try and stop the car. Instead of stopping it, she ends up crashing it into a parked car and the van flips over. Everyone is okay—besides a few broken bones and scratches—although Midnight Confessions has to cancel the rest of their tour. After the crash, Tory disappears before the police can question her. The police keep searching, but she's still missing when the novel ends. While this storyline might not be as easy to relate to as Holland's, having a few crazy fans is something that all bands have to deal with at least once. I wanted to make my bands as realistic as possible, so I added a conflict that can be told throughout multiple novels. It also makes readers want to keep reading and find out what happens with Tory.

Lastly, after coming back from tour, Nate finds out that his girlfriend, Anna, cheated on him. They break up and he's devastated. He hides in his room and doesn't come out for the other members of The Papercut Project. Eventually, his sadness turns into anger and he starts to write a new album all about her. The album is very harsh, but it's a coping mechanism for him. Eventually, he starts becoming himself again. So of course he runs into Anna again while he's drunk. Her new boyfriend had broken up with her and she wanted

Nate to take her back. While he doesn't take her back, he does end up having sex with her. After that The Papercut Project gets into the car accident with Midnight Confessions and they finish their album, which is set to release in March. At the album release party, everyone is still somewhat healing from the year that they had. Midnight Confessions, Holland, and Carson come to the release party too. About halfway into the night, Anna shows up and tells Nate that she's pregnant and that's the end of book one. A lot of musicians write songs that have to do with what is happening in their lives. Having Nate write an entire album about his break up allows readers to see into the process that song writers go through. While making Anna get pregnant at the end is definitely a cliffhanger, it also complicates Nate's life. A lot of people will get over their ex and then have him/her appear right back in their life. Majority of my readers will be able to relate to Nate.

Book Two

Nate is going through a crisis after finding out that Anna actually isn't pregnant. It is never mentioned whether or not Anna faked the pregnancy in order to get Nate back, but there is a lot of room for interpretation. Even though Nate isn't going to be a father, he started thinking about the What If? He thinks that what he's doing with his life isn't doing anything good. He wonders what he's doing with his life. Suddenly, he feels completely insignificant. He wants to make a difference in the world, but he just sees himself as a guy in a band who parties everyday. Soon, his feelings get the best of him and he disappears to California without telling any of his band mates. While The Papercut Project tries to find Nate, people start talking about rumors of them going on tour. Before Nate disappeared, they had plans to go on tour with another band called An Arrow to the Sun. Every band but

The Papercut Project announces the tour, making fans confused and wondering what is going on with the band. One day, a girl comes up to Nate in a coffee shop and tells him how his band literally saved her life. Once she leaves, he realizes the difference he is making in people's lives. He never realized that his music was making the difference that he wanted to make all along. He drives back home to Arizona and they announce the tour. This storyline was very important when you're writing about a band. A lot of people think that bands just have fun all the time and they don't have a "real job" but they don't realize the difference that bands make in people's lives all the time. While researching for this series, I went to a lot of concerts and heard many stories about how a certain band has saved someone. Along with that, I've had songs really speak to me. I wanted to use this storyline to make people understand just how important music is to people, especially teenagers.

Meanwhile, Kai meets a girl, Emmy, at a store. Kai is very shy and never really likes to talk to people. The only time he feels completely confident around people is when he's on stage. But when he meets Emmy, he isn't shy at all. They start to date and everything is good between them. This storyline is small, but I wanted it to grow into something bigger. While Holland wants to find love wherever she can, Kai is too shy to meet new people. I wanted to bring Kai into the story a little so that readers could see how Holland and Kai change each other throughout the series.

Just like Kai, Holland meets a guy at a Papercut Project concert at the end of the summer. His name is Finch and his band, An Arrow to the Sun, is following The Papercut Project in order to get their name out. Holland doesn't tell him that she knows The Papercut Project but he finds out the next morning when Finch sees Holland and Carson standing around their tour bus saying goodbye to The Papercut Project. Once The Papercut

Project goes on tour with Finch's band, Holland starts to see him more. They end up kissing outside of a bar after The Papercut Project and An Arrow to the Sun's tour date in Wisconsin—which is only about an hour away from Holland's town. She doesn't tell anybody about it, but they start texting afterwards. Back at home, her and Carson are researching colleges. Holland doesn't really care where she goes, so she ends up picking a college about an hour away with Carson. Holland and Finch's storyline is probably my favorite in the entire series. After what happened with Wylee, she meets Finch, the completely opposite of Wylee. Because of that, she starts to like him. She thinks that this time will be different, and so far she is right. I wanted to show readers that there is always something better out there for them if they just wait. Holland moved on after Wylee and eventually found Finch, who already treats her better than Wylee and they aren't even dating. And, Finch is single.

Along with that, I really liked Carson's character so I wanted to add her in, although her storyline is very minor. Her parents are getting a divorce and she's pretty relieved about it. All her parents did was fight all the time. But because they are going through a very harsh divorce, Carson is at Holland's house all the time. Here readers start to see just how close Carson is with Holland's family. I wanted to use Carson to show that people can create their own family. A lot of teenagers are struggling with family problems, so I wanted to use Carson to show them that blood doesn't make someone family; they can make their own families if they want.

Lastly, Midnight Confessions is still trying to deal with the car accident. They wonder what happened to Tory, but they never think twice about it. Soon, though, Montgomery starts to receive letters from Tory saying that she's sorry. He feels

uncomfortable about them, especially when the letters seem like she's been watching him. He has a feeling that she's stalking him. Once a picture of him in his backyard is posted on the Internet, he tells his band mates what is going on with her. They file a restraining order, but there's not much they can do since she isn't there. On Montgomery's twenty-first birthday, Tory ends up kidnapping Montgomery from the bar they are at. The rest of Midnight Confessions calls Holland and Carson, and they spend all night running through Chicago trying to figure out where Montgomery is. Montgomery is able to text them a few clues and they end up finding him in a hotel room. Tory is arrested and Montgomery is safe. This storyline is very dramatic, but shows the scary side of being in a band. Montgomery's band is small so this probably wouldn't really happen to them; but there are a lot of crazy fans that would try and kidnap their favorite band members. I wanted readers to realize that sometimes it's hard being in the spotlight.

Book Three

Midnight Confessions start to write a new album. While trying to find inspiration for the songs, they starts to do things that they were always afraid to do, like skydiving. Satchel and Montgomery rent a house a few blocks down from Montgomery's mother's house because another thing on the list was "becoming an adult." They figured moving out when bring them another step closer to actually having to act like an adult, something people in their twenties struggle with. Along with that, the band members all get tattoos and Satchel kisses a girl that he likes—although her name isn't mentioned. The song "What Are You Waiting For" by Paradise Fears inspires this storyline. In the music video, Paradise Fears takes fans and helps them doing something they've always wanted to do. I thought that was

interesting, so I wanted my characters to do it too. I wanted readers to realize that they shouldn't be afraid to do something they have always wanted to do because you'll just end up regretting not taking that chance when you could.

While Midnight Confessions write their album, Holland and Carson start college and are roommates. They are enjoying the freedom of living out of the house, even though Farrah is sad to see her youngest child leave. She's still hooking up with Finch and keeping it a secret. During a party in Arizona in New Years Eve, Finch confesses a secret that he's been keeping to himself. He hasn't dated anyone in the past two years because his last girlfriend—who looked a lot like Holland—died in a car accident on prom night. While Holland was able to help him cope, he's still dealing with everything that happened. Holland is shocked about what she's learned, but ends up sleeping with Finch for the first time. During Spring Break, they are exposed when someone walks in on them about to have sex. Montgomery freaks out and punches Finch in the face before Holland and Finch can explain anything, giving him a black eye. Kai gets upset too and doesn't speak with Finch for a long time. After everyone has a chance to cool down, they decide to cover up what happened by saying that Finch got the black eye while he was drunk. While fans don't exactly know if that's the truth, there's no evidence that anything else happened so they accept it. Meanwhile, Montgomery forbids Holland from seeing Finch. Before Holland leaves to go back to college, she meets up with Finch to tell him that they probably shouldn't see each other for a while. Finch agrees, but promises that it won't be the last time that they talk. Holland goes back to college to try and fix everything. Carson is upset that Holland didn't tell her about Finch and Montgomery still wants to kill Finch. When Midnight Confessions decides to go on Warped Tour, a giant summer musical festival,

Holland is able to convince Montgomery to let her and Carson go with. She quickly calls Finch and tells him to buy a ticket to his Warped date and they would talk then. With this storyline, I not only wanted to show how protective Montgomery was with his sister but I wanted to show that sometimes other people stop you from doing something. Some parents don't allow their children to date a certain person and they would be able to relate to Holland. Along with that, I set up a lot of conflict to happen in the future.

Holland isn't the only one with relationship problems. The Papercut Project starts to notice that Kai is changing because of Emmy and not in a good way. He's started to dress completely different and doesn't do things that he loves because Emmy doesn't like it. When Emmy complains that Kai and Lily are a little too close, he starts to avoid Lily. This upsets Lily and the rest of the Papercut Project talks to Kai about what's going on. He gets upset and doesn't listen to what they are saying. Even though Emmy seemed perfect for Kai, readers start to doubt that they should actually be together. This storyline can show readers the consequences when people start to change for their girlfriend/boyfriend. Even though Kai doesn't realize that it's happening, he ignores his friends when they confront him. Because of that, he's straining the relationships he has with his friends because of a girl.

Book Four

Both Midnight Confessions and The Papercut Project are on the Warped Tour. They are excited to be able to spend all summer hanging out together. While Holland convinced Montgomery that everything was over between her and Finch, she secretly devises a plan to meet up with Finch when Warped Tour comes to his town. When the day comes, Carson

distracts Montgomery and Finch is able to sneak into Midnight Confessions tour bus to talk with Holland. Even though they end up having sex, Holland decides to break it off. She says that they don't know each other as a real couple, just a person to make out with. They didn't give themselves time to be friends before they started hooking up. Finch understands and they part ways. Montgomery finds out right when everything is done. He runs into the bus to see Holland curled up on the couch with tears in her eyes. She looks up at him and just says, "It's over." Even though he never liked Finch and Holland together, he sits with her and holds her hand. I wanted to show how Holland is becoming stronger. A year ago, she wouldn't have let Finch go. He was the closest she had to someone loving her, and she wouldn't have wanted to let that go. But now, she realizes that she deserves more and wants to find it. About a week later, Wylee surprises Holland on tour. He hangs out with them afterwards and they all get pretty drunk. Holland is still trying to get over what happened with Finch and she talks to Carson and Wylee about it. Not realizing Holland and Finch were a secret, Wylee accidentally spreads the story around. Soon enough fans have found out about it. They're upset about the bands lying about Finch's black eye and they turn against Holland. They call her a slut and tell her that the only reason she gets to go on tour is because she sleeps with the band. She tries to explain that she's more than just a musician's little sister" but they don't believe her. Both Midnight Confessions and An Arrow to the Sun try to explain to fans what happened. Most of the fans start to understand—especially when Montgomery tells them that she's helped the band write songs—but there are still a few fans that insult her on social media. Just like with Wylee, Holland fell for the wrong guy and it ended up hurting her. This time, though, it wasn't Finch's fault. I think this storyline is very important for young girls. Too many times, girls are called sluts because

they've had sex or even if they just kissed a guy. What Holland is going through isn't unique; it was just blown up because of the person she hooked up with. By letting readers see how the bullying affected Holland may make them think twice before calling a girl a slut, even if they're joking about it.

Meanwhile Kai must go between Lily and Emmy, who hate each other. Emmy is constantly making rude comments about the tank tops Lily wears and telling her to stop flirting with Kai, even though Lily's not. Lily isn't much better. She keeps trying to make Emmy's life miserable while on tour. She doesn't include Emmy whenever Lily, Carson, and Holland hang out. After Emmy calls Lily a slut and a man stealer, Lily starts to yell at her. She mentions how Kai is closer to Holland than Lily and says that Kai and Lily aren't going to stop being friends just because Emmy wants them to. This makes Emmy angry. When Kai hears about what happened with Holland and Wylee, he rushes to her and punches Wylee. This makes Emmy mad, and she tells him that he can't be friends with Holland. After that, Kai finally understands what his friends were talking about and breaks up with Emmy. After everything that happened, Kai is getting a little stronger. He was able to realize that he was changing for the worst and did something about it.

Book Five

Holland starts her sophomore year of college while people keep talking about her scandal with Finch. There's a guy in one of her classes that looks exactly like Finch and she decides to stay far away from him. Eventually, though, he starts talking to her and she talks about. She makes sure to let him know that she's not looking for a relationship. After everything that happened with Finch and Wylee, she decides that she needs a break from

guys. This is a big step for Holland. Eventually, he starts pressuring her to go on a date with him, but she keeps saying no. They end up kissing, but Holland is able to stop it before they do anything else. Since the last novel had a lot to do with Holland, I scaled back on her storyline to focus on others. I did want to show how she is growing up and understanding what she needs/deserves. After dealing with Finch and Wylee, she knows that she needs to take a break for herself and actually sticks with it. When the Finch look-a-like kisses her, she pushes him off instead of just falling for the kiss. Not only is Holland making mistakes, she also learning from them, which is something teenagers should understand. Teenagers are going to make mistakes, but that's okay as long as they learn something from those mistakes.

While Holland is dealing with the post-Finch scandal in college, *Midnight Confessions* goes on tour in the UK. There, they do some interviews but journalists just want to ask Montgomery about what happened with him and Finch. He starts getting angry because he doesn't want to talk about it, actually leaving one interview because the journalist wouldn't stop questioning him about it. Once he gets back home, he meets a girl without trying. He hasn't dated anybody since Tory because he was afraid of finding another crazy girl. But this girl, Kennedy, is the farthest thing from crazy and she actually helps him get through the anger he's feeling about Holland and Finch. As I was writing this novel, I noticed that I hadn't had anything happen in Montgomery's love life in a while. Because of that, I wanted to write in a character that would help Montgomery deal with everything that has happened to him lately. Kennedy will help him deal with the journalists and Finch, and actually teach him a little about girls. Montgomery had been so angry at

Finch for what happened, but she made him realize that his sister is a grown up and that she could make her own decisions about guys.

Meanwhile, Carson starts hinting that she's dating someone but she doesn't want to tell Holland just yet. While Holland is upset, she doesn't push it farther. She knows that Carson was upset when Holland didn't tell her about Finch. She finally tells Holland around March, but the readers still don't get to know. In April, Carson starts freaking because she thinks she's pregnant. Holland sits with her throughout everything, and when they find out the Carson is pregnant, Holland calls her boyfriend. Satchel gets the text while sitting with his band mates and drives away without even explaining where he was going. When he gets to Carson's dorm, Holland is waiting for him. He talks with Carson—who is afraid he's going to leave her now that she's pregnant—and explains that he's going to be there for her. Teenage pregnancy is a very big topic that gets talked about in lots of young adult novels. Because of that, I wanted to add that into my series. Carson and Satchel are going to have to change and grow up very fast, and I wanted to show their struggle with doing that. Similarly, Carson's mother is very strict, so I wanted to be able to add some conflict with that.

Lastly, Kai is having an existential crisis after breaking up with his girlfriend. He thought that she was going to change him for the better and make him more outgoing; but he ended up just damaging a lot of friendships. While that is going on, Nate has started hooking up with a lot of girls. He's still trying to get over everything that happened with Anna, and thinks that the only way to do that is to not have a relationship. When he tries to hook up with a girl in a relationship, the rest of The Papercut Project decides to have an intervention with him. Nate thinks that they're going crazy and doesn't listen to them.

Toward the end of the novel, Owen is attacked while out for a walk at night and is left for dead. The Papercut Project start freaking out because they realize just how close they came to losing Owen. Kai realizes that Emmy doesn't matter anymore. She wasn't the right person for him so he shouldn't let her affect her like he was doing. Nate and Lily kiss at the hospital, making Nate realize that maybe relationships are okay if they're with the right person. A lot is changing for The Papercut Project in this novel. They are really starting to learn who they are and what kind of person they want to be in the world. Owen's attack makes them all come together and break out of the bubbles that they were living in.

Book Six

When The Papercut Project comes into town, Midnight Confessions decides to host a party at Montgomery and Satchel's house. Jay gets pretty drunk and walks out in front of a car, killing him. Montgomery saw the whole thing happen and blames himself for it. Kennedy tries to tell him that it was an accident, but Montgomery doesn't believe her. The band and fans are devastated, and Midnight Confessions takes a little break from the music scene. Jay's death comes as a huge shock to all of them, and they spend the rest of the novel trying to come to terms with what happened. While the main reason that I killed Jay was to create conflict throughout the characters, Jay's death actually strengthens the other characters. It made Montgomery and Kennedy grow closer, and it made the other band members take a step back and reevaluate their lives. Along with that, I wanted fans to come together for the band, just like they do when an actual band member dies. The band aren't the only people affected, and I wanted to show that.

When Carson is about four months pregnant, she gains the courage to tell her mother about the baby. Just like expected, her mother is furious with her; but Carson doesn't expect her to disown her. Coping with that shock, Carson turns to Holland's mother, Farrah, a lot more than usual. Farrah helps her deal with her angry mother and pregnancy, and Carson thinks of Farrah more as her mother than her real mother. Satchel is also trying to step up and be a better person. He knows that he needs to be a better role model for his child, so he stops doing drugs and is there for Carson when he needs her. Carson has her baby in December, right before finals. When she gets back to school after winter break, she struggles with going to school and raising a baby. Even though Satchel is there to help, she's very stressed out. On Jay's birthday (January 26), she disappears and leaves Satchel and Holland in charge of her son, Parker. Even though she wrote them a note saying that she was okay, Satchel and Holland spend the night looking for her. Carson ends up driving to Farrah's house to talk to her. Farrah comforts Carson and helps her deal with her feelings toward Parker. Carson feels better after talking with Farrah and decides to go back home. I knew right when I made Carson pregnant that I wanted her to have a rough time with the baby. It would be too unrealistic for her to be able to manage school and a baby, and I knew I didn't want her to drop out. I wanted to push her character to the max and then have other characters step in to help her out.

After kissing at the hospital, Nate and Lily decide to start dating. They have a rocky start because they are used to being friends and don't know how to jump into that next step. After what happens with Jay, they decide to go on a road trip to strengthen their relationship. Being able to step away from their band helps them act more like a couple and not just two friends. Since Nate and Lily have been in a band together since high school, I

wanted to make them struggle with their relationship at first, especially since I made Montgomery and Kennedy's relationship develop very easily. Having Nate and Lily's relationship struggle added a lot of conflict to their characters and made them have to really fight if they wanted to be together.

Feeling a little left out, Kai starts talking to Holland more. They start texting regularly, and both Kai and Holland are enjoying their conversations. Neither one of them really has a storyline for themselves because they are supporting characters for others—Holland is helping Carson and Lily confides in Kai about her rocky relationship with Nate—but I did want Holland and Kai to start becoming a little closer. Since both of them are single, I wanted readers to start and think about the possibility of them starting a relationship.

Book Seven (Honors Thesis)

While I didn't finish the whole novel for my honors thesis, I know where I want to take it. Not everything is planned out and some might change when I go to actually finish it, but this is what I'm thinking for the rest of the novel.

Holland is writing a book about a girl whose brother is in a band, which is referencing her and Montgomery. I wanted the series to be a little circular—like *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. While she's trying to write this novel, she's also helping Carson take care of Parker on tour, which distracts her from writing. In order to get away from Carson and Parker for a little while, she starts spending a lot of time in Kai's tour bus. One day during tour, they kiss. After talking about it, they realize that they both have feelings for each other. When they tell everyone else, they're all excited that Holland and Kai finally

realized it, since they all had figured it out a while ago. Holland has struggled with guys throughout the series, and Kai fell for the wrong girl who changed him, so having them come together made sense. Holland realized that Kai had given her the love she wanted all along while Kai realizes that Holland is the one who can really break Holland out of her shell.

While on tour, Carson has to deal not only with Parker but with the other band members not really wanting her there. They don't know how to act around a baby and it's difficult to handle Parker, who cries a lot. For a while, Carson thinks that he's sick and takes him to doctors during some of their days off. Eventually, they learn that he's growing all of his baby teeth at once and the crying will stop in time. Even though talking to Farrah helped Carson, when Parker starts crying all the time and Satchel decides to accept a tour without talking to her first, Carson starts to get desperate. She's scared of having to take care of Parker by herself and that's why she forces herself onto the tour. I wanted to show that parenting is hard and you always have to be ready for the unexpected.

Lastly, Nate is trying to write a new album while going through writer's block. He's also forced to watch Montgomery write song after song. I want him to finally start getting inspiration to write, but I don't know how I want to do that yet. Also, I want him to ask Holland for help; but make him have to convince her to stop doing her own writing and help him instead. In the end, I want him to be proud of the songs that he writes because he really had to go out and work for them, teaching readers that sometimes your best work is something you have to fight for.

The Miles Ahead

Chapter One

Nate

Nate sat on the couch watching some stupid reality television show that his girlfriend Lily loved. The A/C was working away, trying to compete with another summer in Arizona. Sometimes he wondered why he tortured himself with these reality shows, but then he would look over at Lily's big, genuine smile and know he would do this everyday if it meant watching her smile.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before his phone started buzzing and the moment was ruined.

"What's up?" He asked, not looking at who was calling.

"Oh, Nate, wow," one of his band mates Kai said from the other side of the phone. "You're alive."

He looked over at Lily, confused. She gave him a weird face, wondering who he was talking about, and then looked back at the television. "Uh, yeah?"

"I just say this," he paused, "because none of us have heard anything from you in a few months."

"I hung out with you last week!"

Nate heard someone shuffle in the background and wondered if his other band mates from The Papercut Project were there too. A band meeting without the singer; this must have been some joke.

"No, no, we're not talking about *that*," Kai said. "We mean we haven't heard you talk about music in months."

Now, he understood what Kai was saying. He remembered back in February, right after their last tour date their manager, Dean, had asked them what was next and Nate said that he was thinking about music. Fast forward four months, to this extremely hot day in June, and no one had said another word about that new music.

Until now, apparently.

"Oh, um," Nate said, trying to figure out what to say. "Yeah, about that."

It wasn't that Nate didn't want to write another album; he just didn't have anything to write. Nothing had popped out at him. He hadn't felt an overwhelming urge to grab his guitar, which is what normally happened.

Maybe he was too happy, or maybe there just wasn't anything going on worth writing about; but he knew that he would have to start writing songs again—and fast.

"That doesn't sound promising," Kai said. Nate could almost hear Kai's eyes roll.

"I'm sorry, man," Nate said, truly meaning it. "I'm...I'm trying."

"Well, Dean has been calling around," Kai warned. "You're probably gonna be getting a call soon. You should probably have a few ideas. We can come and help out if you want us to. You don't need to write the entire album yourself."

Nate nodded, even though he knew that Kai couldn't see him. "Yeah, yeah. I'll, um, I'll let you guys know."

When he hung up the phone, he tried to think of anything that could be turned into a song. He rested his head on his hands, hoping The Papercut Project's next best single will just pop into his head.

"Is something wrong, Nate?" Lily asked, leaning closer to him.

He just sighed. "Oh, it's nothing."

Nothing at all.



Carson

Parker sat in his crib, nibbling on a teething toy. His big, hazel eyes stared up at Carson like she was the only person in the world. She loved her little baby and the unquestionable love that he gave her, even if he was a little surprise.

Her and her boyfriend, Satchel, might've had to share a bedroom with their baby in the house they shared with her best friend, Holland, but she wouldn't trade what she had now. It was perfect in its own little way.

She had met Satchel because of Holland. Holland's brother, Montgomery, was in a band with Satchel called Midnight Confessions. At first, Carson didn't really talk to Satchel. She thought he was weird and they didn't have a lot in common. Then one night during a tour, Satchel and Carson were the only ones

awake. They ended up staying up the entire night talking, and she found out that she had a lot more in common with him than she thought.

And now, they had a baby.

In the six months since Parker's birth, his brown hair had started to grow. Now, almost his whole head was filled with a layer of brown. She knew that there was still a long way to go before he had a full head of hair, but something about his growing hair made her worry that he was going to grow up too fast. She knew she was acting crazy, but she didn't want her little baby to just pass her up.

Smiling, she turned back to her desk and tried to finish the last chapter of her homework. She'd been sitting there all afternoon, but she kept getting distracted. Only once had Parker started crying to get taken out of his crib; the other distractions, well, that was just her looking over at Parker. It was hard trying to balance school and a baby. She had to focus on her studies when she was able to, which was a very small timeframe.

"You're such a little trickster," Carson said to Parker. "Making me forget about my homework. You can do some serious damage with your cuteness."

Parker just looked up at her blankly. A second later, he grabbed one of the toys in his crib and started playing with that, discarding the teething toy and Carson.

Carson sighed, turning back to her homework. After talking with Farrah, Holland's mother, she'd been trying a little more to be happy. Farrah was as close to a mother as Carson had. Her own mother, Mrs. Carson-Daugherty, had disowned Carson the minute she found out she was pregnant. Carson didn't really have a great relationship with her mother before that, but the pregnancy definitely cut the rest of the ties they had.

Farrah had told her that she needed help. Her and Satchel couldn't raise Parker alone, especially if Carson was still in school and Satchel travelled a lot. Luckily, Farrah had a plan. Holland had been a big part of that plan, watching Parker when Satchel couldn't and Carson was too stressed out, and Farrah said that she would make the long drive down once a month to hang out for a week. It had been so nice to learn that she didn't have to do it by herself. Others, besides just Satchel, would be more than willing to help her.

At the end of the semester, she had only failed one class. She'd decided to retake it as well as take two other classes this summer, to not fall behind. She needed to graduate that year. If she had to stay longer, she knew there was no

way that she would ever graduate. Parker would be getting older; she wouldn't be able to just stick him in his crib forever.

"Okay," she said, looking at Parker one last time. He kept playing with his toy, not paying attention to her voice. "One more chapter and you're mine, little boy. I'm going to read as fast as I can and then maybe we can go and find out if you like ice cream!"

He looked up, giving her a little smile, and then without warning, scrunched up his face and started screaming. Immediately, Carson's heart sank. There was no way he was actually crying right now. She was so close to the end. Why couldn't he have waited ten more minutes?

Quickly, she walked over and pulled him out of his crib, hoping that he just wanted to be in her arms. She sat back down, bouncing him in her arms, but he only screamed louder. She sighed, begging Parker to just be quiet for a few more minutes. She was so close to the end.

Only one chapter. Fifteen pages, she thought to herself. Come on, Parker. I just need one more chapter.



Holland

Holland could hear baby Parker crying from her best friend's bedroom down the hall, but she couldn't get up from her bed now. Her laptop shook as she frantically typed away on the keyboard. *The first time Audrey Davenport met Reaching the Moon, she was fourteen.* In her three years in college, she hadn't been as inspired to write as she was now.

She was studying creative writing, but she had no idea how she wanted to use that degree. For the past year or so, she'd been thinking that helping artists write songs would be pretty cool. She already had a lot of experience helping Montgomery. Her brother was always asking her for writing advice, and he usually listened to what she had to say. It shouldn't have been too hard to break into that industry, especially since a lot of bands like her brother's band, Midnight Confessions, knew that she helped with songwriting.

Now, though, she was writing a novel that was going to be longer than a song. It was about a girl whose brother is in a band, and Holland was going to

add in all her adventures with Montgomery. While a lot of it was going to be nonfiction, she didn't want to use everyone's names. That made it seem a little too personal. She just wanted people to know all the amazing things she got to do in her lifetime.

Her friend Kai was actually the one who gave her the idea to do it. They were texting one time—he was somewhere in North Dakota, on tour with his band The Papercut Project—and they were talking about past tours. Holland had gone on a few tours with them, including one summer at Warped Tour.

You know, someone
should write all of this
down. It would make for
any interesting story.

Holland knew his text was a joke, but she couldn't get the idea out of her mind. What would happen if someone *did* write it down? When she couldn't stop thinking about a girl named Kaylee who loved that her brother was in a band, she knew that she was the one who would write everything down. In a way, it seemed like she had to.

She wondered if this was how her brother Montgomery felt whenever he started writing a new song.

When she heard Parker's cries grow louder, she started typing faster, trying to get her idea out before she lost it forever. She could concentrate a lot better when she knew that Parker was okay. Even though she wasn't his mother, she still treated him almost like her son. Sometimes Carson needed her to be a second mother. Carson couldn't do it all on her own, and with her boyfriend, Satchel, away on tour for weeks at a time, she needed someone that would be able to step into a parent role and help her out. Holland didn't really mind that much, but she hoped that she would still be able to write this story while helping Carson.

Her brother, Henry, had met them when their bands toured together and the two bands had started up a friendship. When the band went on tour again, Henry had offered his house as a place for them—

"It's okay, Parker. Please, just...stop crying," she heard Carson over Parker's cries, which now sounded more like screams. "There is nothing to worry about."

A second later, Holland saw her bedroom door open. Carson, her orange hair a little messy from where Parker must have grabbed it, and Parker, whose face was bright red, appeared in the doorway. Holland knew what was coming before Carson even opened her mouth.

"Could you please watch him for just a second?" Carson asked, already stepping into the room. "I only have ten more pages to read in my homework that I really need to finish. I have a quiz tomorrow."

Holland sighed. She really didn't want to watch Parker, even for that short of time; but with Satchel an hour and a half away in Chicago, she didn't want Carson to be all alone with the baby.

"Sure, I guess," she said, reaching her hands out to take the screaming baby. She turned to Parker, rocking him a little while Carson ran out of the room. "Why are you crying, buddy? What is bothering you?"

She glanced at her computer screen. Carson had interrupted her in the middle of a sentence, and now Holland didn't know how she wanted to finish it.

"Thanks a lot, little guy," she joked, pacing her room.

There was no way that she was getting back into the flow of writing any time soon. She kept trying to convince herself that Carson needed help, and that she was just helping out. She would remember what she wanted to write about later; but Carson was actually doing something for school.

But did that matter? Just because Carson was doing homework didn't mean that what Holland was doing didn't matter. She didn't have to drop everything to take care of Parker.

The minute she thought that, she felt horrible. Carson was depending on Holland to help her out.

No matter what she said, she couldn't make herself not be a little upset. All she wanted to do was write, but now she had a baby to take care of. Writing would just have to wait.

Chapter Two

Carson

It had been three hours and Parker was still crying. Carson was still in her pajamas and her hair was a mess from waking up from a dead sleep. The sun had just risen about an hour earlier. All Carson wanted to do was go back to sleep.

"Parker, it's okay," she recited.

She'd been saying those words so much that they didn't even matter to her anymore. She wondered why she even kept saying them. Things were obviously not okay to Parker.

"What am I supposed to do with you?" she asked, not even bothering to hide the annoyance in her voice. All she wanted to do was sleep for a few more hours. Instead, she had to soothe a baby that was crying over nothing.

It was only seven-thirty in the morning. Holland was probably trying to get some sleep. For a second, Carson was annoyed that Holland wasn't jumping at the chance to help stop Parker's cries. She just wanted the door to open and Holland to come take the baby away from her.

When her bedroom door opened an hour later, Carson breathed a sigh of relief. Holland was *finally* coming to help her. But it wasn't Holland. Instead, Satchel walked through the door with a worried look on his face.

"What's going on?" he asked, rushing over to the two of them. With one hand, he rubbed Parker's head and he rested the other hand on the small of Carson's back. "How long has he been crying?"

"The better question is," she responded, having to shout over Parker's cries, "how long has he not been crying?"

Satchel looked down at Parker, and then back up at Carson. "What happened?"

Carson shrugged, walking Parker around the room. "I have no idea. It started like last week. Parker will start crying for no reason and just cry for *hours*. I feed him, change him, try to make him go to sleep, but nothing happens!"

Now, she was close to tears. She didn't realize just how stressed Parker was making her until Satchel walked through the door. She'd been parenting basically on her own since Satchel went back to Chicago three days ago; but now she could share the role again. Holland was great and all, but she wasn't Parker's parent. She didn't *have* to help if she didn't want to. Satchel did.

"How long have you been up?" Satchel asked, worried.

Carson squinted, trying to think. It seemed like days since she last lay in her bed, but she knew it couldn't have been that long. She was just so tired. "Four thirty? I think."

Satchel's eyes went wide. "Shit. It's almost nine now. He's been crying for *four hours!*"

Carson nodded, rocking Parker. She breathed a sigh of relief when Satchel extended his arms and said, "Let me take him. You get some sleep."

It took all of Carson's energy to hand the baby over. When Parker was safely in Satchel's arms, Carson felt like she was missing a limb. Parker had been in her arms for over four hours.

Satchel looked down at Parker, trying to stop his cries just like Carson had been doing. For a second, Carson stood there watching them. She loved watching Satchel hold their son; it was almost just like how he held his bass. He loved making music so much, and now he loved his little baby too.

It took Carson a second to realize that Parker wasn't crying anymore. She had gotten so used to his cries—which were more like screams—that they played in her brain like a song on repeat. But once the song stopped, she realized just how quite it was.

"What's wrong?" She said, rushing over to Satchel and Parker. "Did he stop breathing?"

Satchel didn't have to respond. Parker's eyes were wide open, staring at his mother like the last four hours hadn't happened. Carson looked up at Satchel, her mouth wide open.

"How the *hell* did you make him stop crying?"

Satchel just shrugged, looking down at Parker. "Eh, we've bonded." Then he turned around and started walking toward the door. "I'll take him out in the living room for a while so that you can get some sleep, honey. Don't worry about us. And if he starts crying again, just ignore it."

Once Satchel and Parker were out of the room, Carson collapsed on the bed. She was so exhausted, yet she couldn't fall asleep. She kept waiting to hear Parker start crying again.

Even after fifteen minutes of Carson staring up at the ceiling, Parker still hadn't made a sound.



Nate

Nate had no idea how long he had been shut up in his room, hours and days would've all been the same. All he knew was that he couldn't write a song. Everyone was counting on him to write the next great album: his fans, his band, probably even his mother.

But what was wrong with him? Why couldn't he think of a song? It wasn't like nothing had happened to him since the last album. He'd fallen in love with one of his best friends, went through a pretty rough patch in that relationship, and had some great times with his friends. He should've been spilling out stories.

Yet here he sat, with nothing.

He strummed the first song that he'd learned to play on the guitar, hoping that that would spark something. His mind was still blank by the time he finished the song.

"Ugh, what is wrong with me?" He shouted into the empty room. "Songwriting is the easy part of being in a band!"

He put the guitar down and rested his head on his hands. *What if I can't write another song*, he thought to himself. *What if it's all over for me?*

He started thinking about what he would do if he couldn't be in the band. He'd never gone to college, and he didn't really feel the urge to go. So that was out. Being a music teacher was *definitely* out. His family always said that he would probably just end up being a teacher. He didn't want to prove them right.

As he was getting deeper into his despair, he started thinking about what The Papercut Project had done for him. They'd been in a band since Nate was fifteen years old. He was twenty-six now. It had been almost eleven years.

The band had started out just like any other band. They played out of Kai and Owen's garage, having to stop when their mother called them in for dinner. Nate was seventeen when they played their first "real" show with an actual audience in a bar.

After that, there was the tour. That's when he met Midnight Confessions. Once their second tour came around, Montgomery offered them a place to stay in Chicago. They'd crashed at friends' houses before—it was all part of the job—but their friendship with Midnight Confessions was new. Still, none of them could turn down a free place to stay.

And that's when all the fun started. Midnight Confessions was the band that they grew up with. Their successes somewhat mirrored each other. When The Papercut Project had some success, so did Midnight Confessions. The songs came easy after that.

But now, somehow he hit a wall. His life was still changing, but for some reason he didn't want to write about it. He needed to find some inspiration. The only question was how.

As he was thinking, he heard a faint knock on the door. When he turned toward the door, he saw Lily's face peek in.

"Hey there, baby," she said softly. "How's it going in here? Write an amazing song yet?"

Nate sighed, falling back onto the bed. He covered his eyes with one of his arms, trying to block out everything.

"That bad, huh?" Lily said, walking over to the bed.

"It's even worse than that."

She patted his leg. "Maybe you're stressing yourself out too much. Why don't you take a break?"

Nate sighed, frustrated. "I can't take a break. I've been taking a break for months. Everyone wants a new record and I need to give it to them."

Even though he was snapping at Lily, she wasn't the one he was upset with. If only he could write one song, he would feel so much better; but, as much as he wanted to admit it, that wasn't happening any time soon. He needed to figure out a fix for his writer's block this minute.

"Maybe I'll just write the most pointless songs," Nate said, knowing that was a horrible idea. "I could, like, write about cheese or something."

Lily made a funny face. "You don't want to do that, Nate."

He sighed, nodding. "Yeah, I know. But there's nothing else that will fix this!"

Just then, his phone rang. When he saw who it was, his nerves skyrocketed. It was Dean, The Papercut Project's manager. He knew that meant only one thing: he wanted to know how the new album was going.

"Do I have to answer this?" Nate whined, looking at Lily.

"Yes you do," Lily nodded.

He sighed, sliding his phone to answer. "Hello?"

"Nate, hey," Dean said on the other end of the phone. His voice was rushed, like he'd just run a mile. "So this amazing opportunity came up. I have this tour

set up and no bands to play it. What would you say to a tour with Midnight Confessions?"

Nate's mood brightened. A tour with his best friends would be perfect. He would have so many song-worthy experiences. "That sounds awesome! When would it be?"

"Uh," Dean paused. "Well...three days from now. We would have to fly to Chicago, oh, tomorrow."

"What?" Nate shouted, shocked. "You can't be serious."

Dean laughed. "Oh I'm totally serious. What do you say?"

Nate didn't even have to think about it. "Yeah we're totally in! I'll call the others."

Immediately after he hung up with Dean, he frantically started finding Kai's contact.

"What's going on?" Lily asked, looking a little nervous.

"We're, uh, Dean got us." He was so excited that he couldn't even get the words out. Finally, he took a deep breath. "Dean got us a tour. We leave tomorrow."

"Seriously?"

He found Kai's number and clicked the call button. "Oh yeah, I'm serious. You might want to start packing."

As the phone was ringing, Nate smiled, getting happier by the second. This tour was exactly what he needed in order to start writing. He could already imagine what it would be like: The Papercut Project and Midnight Confessions traveling around the country, playing songs and trying to write an album. Could it really be that easy? He really hoped so. This was his last option.



Holland

Silence: that was the first thing Holland noticed when she woke up. Parker wasn't crying; he wasn't even making a sound. At first, it was nice and peaceful. She could actually enjoy the few minutes before she had to get out of bed. But as she lay there under her covers, she started to wonder *why* he wasn't crying. Was something wrong? How had Carson gotten him to stop crying?

She found it interesting that everything always came back to Carson.

When she opened her bedroom door, she saw Parker sitting in his highchair in the dining room while Satchel put a little jacket on him. Parker looked up at Holland and smiled.

"Oh hey," Satchel said, looking over his shoulder at Holland. "Perfect timing. Carson is trying to get some sleep and I want to take Parker to the park so he's out of the house. It would be so awesome if you could come along. You know this area better than me."

Holland sighed. She had a day of writing planned out, and it would've been great to write without Parker in the house, but she also knew that Satchel needed her to come with him and help. No matter how much she wanted to say no, she just couldn't.

"Yeah, sure," she sighed, turning back to her room. "Let me just get dressed. I'll be out in like five minutes."

After throwing on a pair of shorts and a tank top, she found Satchel and Parker waiting for her outside. It was a hot summer day. The sun was shining high up in the sky, making Holland's skin turn red as they walked to the park. Satchel had put at least one bottle of sun screen on Parker before they left. Holland couldn't help but laugh. She never expected Satchel to be a father. He was just too out of control, smoking way too much weed and never really being in any conversations.

Now, with Parker sticky with sunscreen, Holland watched Satchel push him in a swing. Parker giggled each time Satchel came close, making Satchel laugh. Holland smiled, and then looked back down at her phone. She was texting Kai, who was packing for tour. Apparently, The Papercut Project would be flying to Chicago tomorrow for a surprise tour with Midnight Confessions. She'd just found out about it about five minutes ago, so she hadn't been able to ask Satchel about it yet.

Kai:

It's so weird. Dean just called Nate out of nowhere and said that he had this awesome tour scheduled and wanted to know if we wanted to do it. There has to be some sort of catch that he's just not telling us about.

Holland:

Yeah, it's very strange that you guys are just hopping on a tour without warning. I thought tours took a while to schedule and stuff.

Kai:

And also, Nate is going through a huge crisis because he can't write any songs so this tour is just gonna be a shit show because you know how Nate gets when he's going through a crisis.

Holland laughed at the text from Kai, knowing exactly what he meant. Nate could get a little dangerous when he was going through a crisis. The last time, after finding out that he wasn't going to be a father, he started sleeping with everyone and eventually ran away to California for a few days. No one could predict what would happen this time.

Holland:

Well, I hope nothing explodes. That would be really unfortunate for you guys. I would definitely like you to come out of it in one piece.

Holland looked over at Satchel and Parker again. Parker was out of the swing and they were walking back toward Holland. In the twenty minutes that they had been at the park, Parker hadn't cried once. Holland was very curious about Satchel's secret to get him to not cry.

When they got back to the shade that Holland was hiding under, Holland grabbed Parker out of Satchel's arm, wanting a little bit of baby time. He sat on her lap, playing with the holes on the picnic table. He was just old enough to stand up, so Holland had to hold his hips to support him. When her phone buzzed, she glanced down at the screen.

Kai:

Yeah don't we all. But you might want to start accepting the fact that there is a really big chance something will be destroyed during this tour, and it might just be my dignity.

Holland laughed at her phone and Satchel said, "What's happening?"

She shook her head. Instead of answering him, she shot him her own question. "Have you told Carson about the tour yet?"

Satchel looked shocked, as if Holland knew something she shouldn't have. After glancing at Parker, he looked at her and said, "No not yet." Holland opened her mouth to yell at him, but he quickly went on. "It's not my fault! I came home to tell her, but then the baby was crying and she was so tired. All I wanted to do was help her and let her get some sleep. I'm going to tell her when she wakes up."

"She's not gonna like it, you know," Holland responded, ruffling the little hair that Parker had. "Parker has barely stopped crying for the past week, and then you come along and he's suddenly silent? She's not going to let you go that easily."

Satchel laughed. "Oh, she'll be fine. Parker was probably just a little cranky. He'll be fine too. She knows this is what I do for a living. We talked about it before Parker was born too. She's fine with watching the baby while I'm on tour as long as I spend time with him when I come back."

Holland shook her head. She knew Carson better than Satchel did, and she knew that Carson would not be happy when she found out that Satchel randomly agreed to a tour without talking to her first. But if Satchel wanted to find that out the hard way, Holland wasn't going to stop him.

She looked back down at her phone, where Kai's open text message was, deciding to change the subject. "Kai is freaking out because apparently Nate is going through a crisis. He's supposed to be writing songs for their next album but he's going through a severe case of writer's block."

"Luckily he'll be around Montgomery," he said, making a funny face at Parker, who smiled. "He's been writing like crazy. Kennedy keeps joking that he's cheating on her with music."

Holland smiled. That sounded like her brother. Whenever Montgomery was invested in a project, he didn't do anything else. Sometimes, when they still lived in the same house, Holland wouldn't see him for days. Her mother would make her peak into his bedroom to make sure he was still there. His girlfriend, Kennedy, would have to just let him be until he finally emerged.

"Yeah, maybe Montgomery can rub some writing magic onto Nate," Holland responded. She spotted Parker as he climbed onto the table. "Then Kai could stop ~~worrying~~ worrying that this tour is going to be a huge disaster."

Satchel shook his head, holding out his arms as Parker crawled across the table to him. "Yeah, we're all in for a dangerous trip. Nate doesn't think clearly when he's having a crisis."

Before Holland could respond, Parker's face scrunched up and he started crying. By now, Holland was used to his cries; but after not hearing it for a while, it came as a shock. "Oh no. Maybe we should get him home."

Satchel nodded, already scooping Parker in his arms. As they sped walked back to their house, Holland thought about Nate. She understood how hard to was to write something when you needed to, and she hoped that this tour would help Nate find some inspiration. Or, if that didn't work out, she just hoped that it wasn't what Kai expected.

Holland:

I'm sure everything will be fine. You're just being a little dramatic. You're going to have so much fun! Wish I could be there.

Chapter Three

Holland

When Holland had gotten back to the house with Satchel and Parker, she immediately set off to her room to try and get some writing done. She was a little behind from watching Parker and she wanted to catch up. Through her closed bedroom door, she could still hear Parker crying. Five minutes after they had come home, she heard Carson's door creak open.

Carson's voice was muffled from Parker's cries, but Holland knew that she was talking to Satchel. She wondered if Satchel was telling Carson about the tour.

When the muffled voices got a little louder, Holland assumed that he had. She smiled a little to herself, happy that Satchel was wrong about how she was going to react. It was pretty clear that she wasn't very happy with Satchel going on tour for a few weeks.

But that was none of her business. She spent too much time thinking about Carson, Parker, and Satchel. Now, she was in her own room; she shouldn't have to bring them in there too.

Thinking this, she turned to her laptop. She'd only written a few sentences since she'd gotten home, but she knew just how she wanted this next scene to play out. Before she knew it, her fingers were flying across the keyboard. She loved being able to jump into this world that she created. It was a lot better than the world she was actually in.

It had always been just him, Audrey, and their mother, she wrote. The three of them were very close. Now that he was travelling for his job, he didn't get to see them every single day like he had all his life. They were always just so close.

She had wanted to make the character close to her family, because that was how Holland was with her own family; but as she wrote, she could tell that she was missing her mother and brother. There was a sense of homesickness in the words that she wrote.

That's why he loved how, after months of traveling, he could be at home for some time before he had to leave again. Sometimes he would even double the amount of time spent at home with the amount of time spent away from home. It balanced out, eventually.

Of course, though, she couldn't stay in her little happy place forever. When she heard her door open, she didn't even have to turn around to figure out that it was Carson.

"Hey Holland, can you *please please please* watch Parker for a little while?"

Holland sighed before turning around. Carson was standing there with Parker in her arms. Her red hair was flat around her face and she wasn't wearing any make up. Parker had his thumb shoved in his mouth and was just staring at Holland was a blank face.

"If you just lay him in your bed he'll probably go to sleep," Carson went on, almost pleading with Holland. "He's kinda tired from the park anyways."

"Yeah sure," Holland said, like she always said. That was her job. She had to say yes no matter what she was doing.

She stood up from her desk and grabbed him out of Carson's arms. Carson smiled, relieved. "Thanks. Satchel and I need to talk about some things and I don't want Parker to get upset. Did you know that Satchel agreed to go on a tour that leaves *tomorrow*? Tomorrow!"

"Oh really?" Holland said, pretending that she hadn't already talked to Satchel about it. She knew that Carson would be angry if she knew that Holland already talked to Satchel about it. "I knew that The Papercut Project was going on tour, but I didn't know that Midnight Confessions was going. That's pretty cool."

"Oh no it isn't," Carson said, shaking her head. "He is definitely not going to get away with this. Like I wanna party too, but now I'm stuck at home with Parker!"

So am I, Holland quickly thought.

Holland smiled, trying not to let her thoughts show. "Oh yeah, I totally understand."

Once Carson had shut the door again, Holland looked at Parker. He had taken his thumb out of his mouth and was now playing with Holland's shirt.

"Your mommy and daddy need to have a little talk," she said, walking him over to her bed. "So you're just going to take a little nap and I'm going to get back to writing, okay? You can do that, can't you?"

It was clear that Parker *couldn't* do that because he started crying as Holland tried to lay him down. He swung his hands around in protest until Holland finally lifted him back up.

"Okay, okay," Holland said, disappointed. "Apparently you don't want to nap right now."

Parker just stared at her. She wondered if he was thinking about crying again.

"How about this," Holland said, pulling Parker into her lap. "How about we both just sit here for a little while and look out the window. Then, if you get sleepy—and I really hope you do—then I'll just lay you down on the bed and go back to writing. Okay?"

Parker put his thumb back into his mouth in response. She sighed, looking out at the window at the wonderful view of a brown fence, thinking about her characters. She could see her laptop from where she was sitting. Microsoft Word was still open, her fairytale world beckoning to her. All she wanted to do was write.

And then Parker started crying.



Carson

Carson could hear Parker screaming in Holland's room, but she couldn't go in there and rescue him just then. She needed to stop Satchel from going on this tour.

"I don't know what the big deal it, babe," Satchel said, sitting on the couch. He had one arm wrapped around the top of the couch, like he was watching television. It annoyed Carson just how relaxed he was at that moment. She was a pacing in front of him. "I go on tours all the time. Sure, this one is a little last minute but that doesn't change anything."

"It changes everything," Carson snapped, trying not to raise her voice. Parker was already crying in the next room, she didn't want him to hear her and then get scared. "You have a baby now! What am I supposed to do?"

Satchel looked at her, confused. "What do you mean?"

"You're just going to leave me with the baby and not even give me a notice? How is that fair to me?"

"I thought you wanted to take care of the baby?"

Carson rolled her eyes. "I want you to help me too. Parker is yours too."

Satchel nodded. "I know, and I want to be there. I *will* be there. But this tour it's huge. I've never heard of a band just have a tour dropped in its lap."

"Look I understand that this is big," Carson said, "but why do you have to take it now? You can't just leave us here. I need you right now."

"But, honey," he said, finally sitting up on the couch, "this is huge for the band. This could lead to more fans and bigger tours. Don't you want me to be successful?"

Carson stopped pacing and stood with her arms crossed. "Seriously, Satchel? Of course I want you to be successful. But I would also like you to think about Parker and I before you agree to go on tour. You can't just leave us without talking to me. I need help here. Parker is...you're the only one that can get him to stop crying."

"Oh that's not true," Satchel laughed. "He was probably just missing me, that's all."

"No," Carson said, staring directly at him. "It is true. You are the only one that can get him to stop crying. When you're not here, he cries *all the time*. Can't you hear him now?"

Satchel jumped a little, like he actually hadn't heard Parker crying. "Oh, well. Maybe he's just tired."

"Or he knows that you're leaving and is very sad about that," Carson snapped.

Satchel stared at her. "Seriously, Carson?"

"Yeah seriously, Satchel," Carson shouted. "Parker knows that you're leaving us again. He can probably sense it. And now I have to be a single parent again."

"You have Holland. And I'll be back in a few weeks. Probably two months."

"I don't want Holland, I want you!" Carson shouted, going back to pacing. "And two months is a long time with a baby. By the time you come back, Parker will almost be a year old. I want you here."

Satchel sighed. "I can't just back out on this tour last minute."

"The entire tour was last minute!"

Satchel didn't say anything for a minute. Carson could see that he was thinking of something; but at that moment, she didn't know if he actually had a brain to think with. Parker's cries had gotten softer, and within a minute he had stopped crying completely. Finally, Satchel sighed. "I don't know what you want me to do."

"I don't want you to go on this tour," Carson said, feeling like she was repeating herself.

"I can't do that, Carson."

Carson sighed, sitting down on the chair next to the couch. "Fine. Then I'm coming with you."

"What?" Satchel said, turning his head to face her. "You can't do that. What about Parker? What about your classes?"

Carson shrugged, like she had already thought about it. "My classes are online, so I can do them anywhere, and Parker can just tag along. That way, you can still go on your tour and I can have some help. You can actually watch our son grow up."

"But what about the others? We can't just bring a baby on tour!"

Carson shrugged. "Well, that's too bad. The only way that you're going on this tour is if we come with you."

Satchel leaned back on the couch, knowing he was cornered. "It's not going to go well. Think of the others."

"Think of me!"

Neither one of them said anything for a second. Even Parker stayed silent in Holland's room. Satchel sighed, leaning his elbows on his knees. "This isn't a good idea, Carson. It's not going to work."

Carson leaned back on the chair. "Well, let's talk about it."



Nate

Just as Nate set his suitcases next to the door, his phone rang. He quickly patted his jeans to find his phone, pulling it out of his back pocket just in time to see it was Montgomery.

"Hey man, what's up?" Nate asked, walking to the couch and plopping down. His ride to the airport wouldn't be there for another ten minutes.

"Nothing much," Montgomery said from the other line. "I'm so freaking excited for this tour. I've been writing, like, nonstop for the past two weeks. I have so many new songs. We might play a few of them toward the end of the tour. I'm so excited."

Nate had heard that Montgomery was writing a lot of songs, but hearing it from Montgomery made Nate a little jealous. All Nate wanted to do was write, and Montgomery couldn't stop writing.

"That's awesome," Nate said, faking happiness. "I'm glad that you're writing so much. I'm trying to write songs for a new album too."

"So I've heard," Montgomery said. "We'll have to get together during this tour and work on our new songs together. Although, I sometimes work better alone so I might sneak away every once in a while."

Nate smiled, hoping that Lily would be there soon so that they could leave for the airport. As much as he loved Montgomery, he hated that he was writing songs and Nate wasn't. Nate would be so much happier if he was writing too.

"Yeah, we'll definitely have to do that," Nate said, hearing Lily's car pull into the driveway.

"Cool," Montgomery said. "Well I just called to talk about airport plans. You still gonna be arriving around four tonight?"

Nate stood up and walked over to the front door, opening it to tell Lily that he was coming. "Yep. Lily just came over to pick me up. We're swinging by and grabbing the rest of them and then we'll be on our way to the airport. You can still pick us up, right?"

"Oh yeah, definitely," Montgomery responded. "It's a The Papercut Project/Midnight Confessions tradition!"

Nate smiled. The two bands had been picking each other up at the airport ever since they met each other. Airports had started to become a reunion place for them. "We can't break the tradition. Well I gotta go now, but I'll call you when we land."

Once he hung up the phone, he grabbed his bags and walked to Lily's car. This tour was going to be so much fun, and he hoped that Montgomery could help Nate write something. While Montgomery said that he works better alone, Nate usually works better when he's with someone else who is also writing. Maybe Montgomery was just what he needed; but at the same time, that phone call had made him really jealous. He hoped that he wouldn't let Montgomery's writing get to him. He was capable of writing his own songs, even if it was less than what Montgomery was writing. He just had to think of his own songs.

Chapter Four

Nate

As Nate rushed off the airplane to find his luggage, he didn't have time to think about the fact that he hadn't thought about writing a song in two days. Once he had found out about this tour, he stopped thinking about everything else. Now, as he stood in O'Hare, he was very aware that he should have a lot more songs written than the zero he had. The Papercut Project should be playing new stuff on tour, like *Midnight Confessions* was planning to do. But they had nothing. *Nate* had nothing.

"Do you have any idea where Montgomery is meeting us?" Lily asked, walking up next to him with her phone in her hand.

Nate shook his head, looking around. "Just that he would be out front."

"This place has a million fronts," Aidan complained behind Nate, "how are we supposed to know which one is the right one?"

"I'm going to call him," Lily said, pulling up his contact on her cell phone.

As Lily talked to Montgomery, the others grabbed their luggage off the conveyor belt. Since they had to pack all of their instruments, it was going to take a while. Lily's drums were about five suitcases themselves. Owen went to hunt down a cart while Nate, Kai, and Aidan quickly pulled all their bags off before they disappeared again. Lily stood off to the side, talking to Montgomery.

Nate couldn't help but notice how beautiful she was, even when she wasn't trying to be. She was wearing black leggings and a loose tank top with The Papercut Project logo that showed a little tease of her blue bra. Her black hair was pulled into a loose ponytail and she only had mascara on. Nate loved that she could look so pretty without even trying to.

Aidan pulled the last suitcase off the conveyor belt just as Lily hung up the phone. Everything was piled up high on the cart Owen found, threatening to fall off with one push.

"All right, we just have to go a little bit that way," Lily explained, pointing to the left, "and then we should run into Montgomery."

Owen nodded, pushing the cart as they all started walking in the direction Lily pointed to. Nate stood next to the cart, watching to make sure that nothing fell out. The airport was full of all different kinds of people rushing around to find people or their flights. Nate searched everywhere, trying to find Montgomery.

Lily pointed in the direction of a section of giant, doors. "He said somewhere over there."

As they walked in that direction, Nate finally spotted Montgomery standing off to the side. He was wearing black skinny jeans, even though it was about eighty degrees out, and he wasn't alone. Holland stood next to him with her arms crossed, looking out to try and find The Papercut Project. Carson and Satchel stood a little off, not talking. Parker was sitting on Carson's hip chewing on Carson's necklace and looking around in curiosity.

"Hey," Nate said to Carson when he reached them, "you coming to say hi?"

Carson smiled, moving Parker a little on her hip. "Nope. I'm coming with!"



Holland

"So...there's a baby on this tour." Kai walked up to Holland, crossing his arms over his black band Tee. Holland couldn't see what band it was. He was wearing dark skinny jeans with holes in the knees and his black hair was poking up a little in the back. She wondered if it had taken a nap during the flight.

After Carson's little announcement that she was coming on tour—and bringing her six-month-old baby—everyone just kind of stood there for a minute. She knew that they were too shocked to say anything. Besides, they probably didn't want to hurt her feelings by telling her that they thought that was a very bad idea. Holland figured that they'd talked to her about Carson before deciding if it was a good idea to talk to Carson. Those boys, and Lily, really liked to gossip.

Once everyone split up to leave, Kai had walked over to Holland.

Holland rolled her eyes at Kai's comment, realizing that her smile was getting bigger. "Oh, don't even look at me. I was stuck in the room with the baby while Satchel and Carson discussed this. If I was in that conversation, I would definitely vote no for the tour, even though that would mean I wouldn't have been able to come. Parker should not be going on this tour I don't know what Carson is thinking. Or Satchel, for that matter."

"Yeah I definitely agree with you there, but you still could've come on your own, you know," Kai said, following as everyone started to walk out the door. "You don't have to go just because Carson goes."

Holland stared at him, pushing the glass door open. She felt a rush of summer air hit her. Carson and Satchel was a little bit behind her, but she still talked a little quieter so that Carson couldn't overhear it. "Oh, you don't know her. I'm basically Parker's second mom. There is no way that she would let me and Satchel go on this tour and leave her alone to care for Parker by herself."

"That's shitty," Kai said. "He's not your kid."

Holland sighed. "Yeah, I know. But I told her that I would help her out. She's still my best friend, even though I think she's insane right now. I hope she realizes that she's not going to be able to do what she used to do on tour. And Satchel isn't going to be much help. He's working right now; this is his job. He can't just drop everything to take care of Parker."

As they reached the car, Kai didn't have time to respond. While Carson fought with Parker to get him into his car seat, everyone else piled in all of the luggage. Luckily, they had brought two cars. Satchel, Carson, and Parker drove the car with the luggage and everyone else piled into Midnight Confessions' van.

Once Carson and Satchel were out of earshot, everyone turned to look at Holland. She knew before they started talking that they wanted to know what was going on with Carson and Parker.

Everything was about Carson and Parker.

"Okay," Nate said, turning around from the front seat. Holland was sitting in the middle row, and there was another row right behind her. "Please tell me Carson is not serious."

Holland shrugged, looking around the car. Montgomery was driving and Nate was sitting next to him. Holland was in the first row with Kai; and Aidan, Owen, and Lily were squished in the third row. Everyone but Montgomery was looking at her. That didn't matter though. Him and the rest of Midnight Confessions had already heard this story. Holland had a front row seat to see their reaction—and it was not good.

"She freaked when Satchel told her that he was going on tour," Holland explained, "and she said that she was coming with. Once she had it in her mind, Satchel wasn't able to talk her out of it. And now, here we are!"

Nate sighed, leaning lower in her seat. "Don't get me wrong, I love Carson and that baby is freaking adorable, but I really do not want to go on tour with a baby. Tour is no place for babies. I mean, she knows what happens on tour. There's a bunch of parting, loud music, the occasional swarm of girls—or boys—and drugs and alcohol. Does she really want to expose Parker to that?"

"Man, I'm getting a little tired of talking about Carson," Holland only half-joked. Then, she said, "Satchel tried to tell her all that and when that didn't work I tried too. She wouldn't listen." When she saw the disappointment in all of their faces, she kept talking. "It's not going to be all bad. I mean, at least you have your own tour bus so you won't have to hear him crying all the time. And you won't have to watch him so you can still go out and party."

Even though Holland expected people to talk to her about Carson, she felt a little bad for Carson that she wasn't a part of this conversation. Holland shouldn't have to always defend Carson; Carson was capable of doing that herself, even if the baby made her not think straight sometimes.

Aidan and Owen nodded, still looking a little bummed. Then, Owen said, "Yeah but Parker will still be around. Your tour bus was always the place to be. Montgomery always brought the best video games and you have the best movies. Now what are we gonna do? Are we ever even gonna see Satchel? Or is all of his free time going to be spent watching his kid?"

Holland shrugged. She really didn't know what to tell them. She didn't want Parker there either; but she wasn't going to change Carson's mind. "I have no idea. Probably. That would mean I could maybe take a break from being Parker's mom for a little bit."

As she said this, Kai's eyes grew wide in realization. "Wait...so *you* might not be able to hang out with us either? Oh man, this tour just went from bad to worse. What's the point of you guys even coming if you aren't going to be able to hang out with us? It would be so much better if you guys stayed home. No offense, Holland. Guys, we need to do something about this. Do you think Carson will listen to us?"

Holland sighed. She didn't have any more answers for them. "I have no idea. Probably not. She's desperate for Satchel to help her with Parker and she was so mad that this tour happened so quickly, but it might be worth a shot."

The van was quiet for a minute. As they turned down the street that lead to Montgomery's neighborhood, Nate pulled out his phone. "Okay, so what do we do? How are we going to approach this?"

"You're making it seem like Carson is a bomb," Holland laughed. "The baby might've made her a little crazy but she's still Carson. She probably knows we're all talking about her anyways."

Nate nodded as Montgomery's house came into view. "True. Okay. How about we just go into the house and tell Carson that we don't think it's a great idea for her to bring the baby on tour."

"That sounds like a plan," Aidan said, looking over at Nate. "But do you really think that it's gonna stop her from coming?"

Nate shrugged. "I have no idea, but we have to do something, right? I definitely don't want to just sit back and not say anything. This is a *tour* not a daycare."

"True," Aidan nodded. Montgomery pulled into the driveway. "Okay, let's do this."



Carson

"They're talking about me. I know it." Carson sighed the second she shut her car door in the airport parking lot. She looked over to Montgomery's van next to her and watched as everyone talked to each other. "I guess it makes sense, but still."

Satchel sighed, following Montgomery out of the parking lot. "Yeah, they probably are, Carson. You did just drop a bomb on them. No one really brings their kids on tour."

"Travis did on that one tour with us," Carson pointed out. Travis was in a different band that they knew. Midnight Confessions toured with his band about a year ago. He had brought his eight-month-old daughter and his wife on tour with him. "No one really cared then. I really don't understand how this is any different."

"Travis also rented hotel rooms every night, and he talked with his band beforehand. Most of the band members already had children," Satchel argued back. "We can't afford to do that. And no one else has kids."

Carson sighed. For once, she wanted Satchel to be fully on her side. It seemed like lately they weren't completely agreeing on anything. She wanted to go back to the times when they were on the same page. Now, she didn't even think they were in the same chapter.

"That doesn't mean anything. We have a tour bus for a reason. And they are so used to noise, a little crying wouldn't hurt them. I just don't understand what their problem is." From the passenger seat, Carson glanced back at Parker

and then looked over at Satchel. For once, Parker wasn't crying. "Did you see the way they all looked at me when I said we were coming? They didn't look excited."

"Like I said, they were in shock. They didn't expect a baby to come on tour with them," Satchel said, trying not to start a huge argument. He was still a little upset that Carson and Parker were coming on tour, but he gave up trying to talk her out of it. "They were all happy to see you. They like you."

"They weren't *excited* though," Carson argued. "It wasn't like it used to be."

Satchel thought for a moment. Carson could tell he was choosing his words carefully. She'd noticed that he'd started to do that lately, like he was walking on a very tight rope around her. She knew that she was being a little emotional, but she didn't think she was acting crazy. Satchel treated her like she was crazy sometimes.

"Well of course it's gonna be different," Satchel finally said, his voice rising a little. "We have a baby now. Everything can't go back to the way it was. I told you that things would be different on this tour, and you didn't listen. It's going to be hard for all of us. You're dropping a baby into a place that babies don't really go. You're making my job harder. I—"

"I'm making *your* job harder," Carson interrupted. "Your main job now is to help take care of Parker, but by deciding to just jump onto this tour made your job and my job harder. It would be different if this tour was a few months from now but..."

Satchel sighed. "I understand that this tour isn't at the greatest time, but it's still an amazing opportunity. And I'll be able to support you and Parker with the money I get from this tour. I know it might not look like it, but tour is stressful sometimes. Now I have to worry about my son being exposed to all of this. I'm not going to be able to help out as much as you think I will be able to, but you'll just end up getting mad at me. I don't go on tour for fun, Carson. This is my career!"

"Well I'm sorry that your life isn't perfect anymore, but what about me? Am I supposed to just put my life on hold just so that you can get a break? How is that fair? I'm not going back home, Satchel," Carson said, defensive. "I need you to help me. I can't do this on my own. Please, Satchel."

Satchel and Holland spent all yesterday trying to convince her not to go on tour; but she just pushed them away. She wanted Parker to know his father and know what he did, and she wanted help raising Parker. That meant that she had to go on tour. But Satchel just wasn't understanding. He thought that she wanted

to go on tour so she didn't feel left out, or something like that. He wasn't listening to her when she said that she just wanted a little help.

Satchel stopped at a red light and looked over at her. He grabbed her hand and squeezed. He took a breath. Parker stayed quiet in the backseat, surprising Carson. "I'm not saying that you should, Carson. I'm just saying...it's going to be different, for both of us. And I hope you realize that not everyone is going to like that you're bringing Parker on tour. You're going to have to accept people talking about you, cause they're going to. Not just the band but fans as well. You have to be prepared for that, just like you need to be prepared for me not to be able to help out too much. Midnight Confessions needs to be able to depend on me."

Carson looked down at their hands, trying to hold back tears. It was weird to hear such logic from Satchel. Usually, Satchel was the one saying crazy things and Carson was the normal one. Now, it was the other way around. Even though Parker had been born about six months ago, Carson must've still had some baby hormones in her. She wondered if she always would.

"Well, they're going to just have to get used to it," Carson said, looking back up at Satchel.

The light turned green and he started driving again, keeping his fingers interlaced with Carson's. "You are too, Carson."

Chapter Five

Nate

There was no way that bringing Parker on tour was a good idea, and Nate had to make sure Carson knew that.

He didn't want to cause a scene at the airport, so he decided to interrogate Holland on the way home to make sure that this wasn't a prank. When they pulled into the driveway, he knew that he had to say something. Once everyone was standing around Montgomery's living room, he finally decided to say something.

"So, um, Carson," he started, "you're going to be with us the whole tour or just some of it?"

The whole room went quiet once Nate started to speak, but he didn't let that scare him. Carson was sitting on the couch and Parker was sitting on her lap, playing with her bracelets.

She glanced at Satchel, who was standing by the hallway that led to the dining room, and then back at Nate. Nate couldn't figure out what that exchange was about, whether Carson thought Satchel told Nate to bring something up or if she wanted Satchel's help with the answer. Everyone else was scattered around the room—Lily sitting on a chair with Nate on the armrest, Owen and Aidan standing over by Satchel; Holland, Kai, and Montgomery sitting on the floor by the fireplace.

Now, they were all staring at Carson, waiting for her answer.

"I'm going to be on the whole tour."

Nate nodded, suddenly nervous. He ran a hand through his hair. "Don't you think that'll be hard? I mean, it's not like you have a room to go into when the baby starts crying."

Even though Carson didn't respond, Nate knew that what he had said upset her. She took a deep breath out, pulling Parker closer to her like she needed to protect him.

"No, I don't think it'll be hard," Carson snapped. "Satchel and I already talked about this. We're going to help each other; and frankly, I don't think it's any of your business."

"Actually, it kind of is our business," Montgomery chimed in. Nate was relieved that someone was getting on his side. He knew they didn't want Parker

there either, but he didn't know if they were going to say anything or not. "We're on this tour too and you didn't even ask what we thought about it."

Carson opened her mouth like she was about to say something, but Montgomery kept going. "Yeah sure, we're not in your family; but we are going to be in the tour bus with you. We're affected by this now too."

"Montgomery, calm down," Satchel said, stepping more into the living room and toward his family. "I understand where you're coming from, but this was a last minute decision. There was no time for us to get together and talk about it."

Nate was surprised that Satchel was defending Carson. From what Holland had said in the car, Satchel didn't want Carson coming either.

"There is always time for a decision like this," Montgomery argued back. "You're bringing a baby on tour. Did you even stop to think about how that was going to affect us? We can't stay up late in our tour bus because the baby will have to go to sleep early. If we stay out late and come back drunk, we'll have to try and be quiet so we don't wake the baby. Not to mention we'll have to adapt to everything that comes with a baby."

"What? Like Satchel can't come out and party with you?" Carson snapped as Parker pulled a piece of her hair. "I think you can get over that. I'm sad that I can't party anymore too but my life has changed."

Nate shook his head, understanding what Carson was missing. "No, that's not what he means. It's just...the tour bus is a band's home while they're on tour. By bringing Parker, you're changing their home without even asking. We don't know what it's like living with a baby. We don't realize that leaving a half full bottle of alcohol in a baby's reach is bad and we won't think twice about smoking some weed in the same room that Parker might play in later on. We're going to have to adjust to a whole new living situation and we didn't even have time to prepare. I have to write an entire album. How am I supposed to do that if a baby is distracting me."

"You should've talked to us about this before you decided anything," Montgomery said, looking from Carson to Satchel.

For a minute, no one said anything. Nate could tell that Carson was really thinking about what they had said. Tears rimmed the bottom of her eyes. Nate felt a little bad about making her cry, but he knew that he had to say everything that he did.

He glanced over at Holland, wondering what she thought about all of this. Carson had put her into a position she couldn't get out of. Holland only came on this tour because of Carson and Parker. Because of that, her tour experience would be completely different too. She couldn't be the carefree Holland that Nate always knew.

Finally, Carson took a breath. She wiped a tear from her eye and then looked up at Nate and Montgomery. "I'm really sorry guys. The last thing I wanted was to get on your bad side. It's just...it's so *hard*. Parker is a lot of work and I can't do it alone. I wanted to come so that Satchel could help me raise our son. I guess I just didn't think about what it would do to you guys because you aren't the ones taking care of Parker."

"Well I'm glad you understand how it feels for us," Nate said, not really knowing what to do now.

"So are you going to rethink coming on tour?" Montgomery asked. "It would probably be the best."

Just then, Parker scrunched up his face and started screaming. Nate actually jumped from the force behind that first cry. He didn't know that a baby could be that loud.

"Oh no," Carson said, jumping up and rocking Parker in her arms. It did nothing to stop the sound. Then, she looked right at Montgomery. "No, I'm definitely still going on tour."



Holland

Carson stood up from the couch, trying to calm Parker down. Of course, that only made his screams worse. Holland knew that Parker wasn't helping the situation; but Carson had already made up her mind, whether or not everyone else thought it was a good one.

"Here I'll take him," Satchel said, walking across the living room with his arms out.

Carson pulled Parker closer to him, rocking him a little more. "No it's okay. I'm just gonna...go find a different room."

Holland knew that Carson just wanted to get out of the living room. It didn't take a best friend to understand that Carson was feeling a little attacked.

She was in a roomful of people who were trying to tell her not to do something she really wanted—or needed, according to Carson—to do. It didn't change the fact that Carson should've taken everyone else into consideration, but Holland understood her position.

Once Nate heard Montgomery's bedroom door shut, he looked around the room, his eyes stopping at Satchel. "Well, I guess everything that I just said went right past her."

Satchel sighed. Holland understood the rough spot that Satchel was in; she was somewhat in it too. Satchel didn't think it was a good idea for Carson to go, but he also knew that she needed help with the baby.

Holland was going through the same dilemma. She wanted to go on this tour and hang out with all of her friends, but she knew that there was no way that Carson would let Satchel and Holland go on tour unless she was going too. Carson was going through a tough time and Satchel wasn't there enough to really help her with everything.

"What do you want me to do about it?" Satchel asked, sitting down on the brown couch. "She's already made her decision."

"Yeah, but can't you tell her not to come?" Nate responded.

Holland shook her head, not liking the question he was asking. "Satchel doesn't tell Carson what she can and can't do. She is her own person, you know."

Now, Nate turned to her with a look of panic on his face. "I didn't mean it like that at all. Obviously Satchel isn't in charge of Carson, but he could talk to her and tell her that going is a horrible idea."

"We've already done that, Nate," Holland said calmly. "She's coming on this tour. Maybe it's not ideal and, yeah, she should've talked to you about it; but there's no changing that now. And also, why don't we talk about Satchel's role in all of this."

At that comment, Satchel lifted his head up in confusion; but Holland continued before he could say anything. "Satchel is Parker's dad. He has the same amount of responsibility as Carson. So he doesn't get off the hook just because this is his job. He could've stayed home just as much as Carson could have."

"But then there wouldn't be a tour," Owen chimed in.

Holland shrugged. "Then there wouldn't be a tour. You guys weren't expecting this tour anyways. Sometimes things just happen."

"I don't understand why we're still fighting about this," Satchel said, inching to the edge of the couch. "Nothing is changing now. Holland's right. It's

either Carson and Parker come on tour or I don't. I hate that that's the case, but I have a son now."

Holland turned to look at Satchel, wondering where those words came from. Satchel was the one that said yes to the tour before even talking to Carson, ultimately forgetting that there were more lives at stake than his now. If Satchel had talked to Carson before giving *Midnight Confessions* an answer, they might've been able to figure out a solution. Carson might've been more open to the idea of Satchel going on tour without her.

This whole mess might've been avoided.

She wanted to call him out on it, but she knew that would cause more drama than she wanted. Instead, she was just happy that he was finally learning what Holland wished that he'd learned at least a week ago.

"Well fine," Nate said, putting his hands up in surrender. "I guess it's settled then. But I hope everyone is prepared for what's to come because let me tell you, it's not going to be easy having a baby on this tour."



Carson

Even though Carson was in Montgomery's room trying to calm down, she had heard enough of the conversation that everyone was having without her. After a few minutes of Parker crying, Carson was able to give him a bottle to settle him down. She kept him in her arms as he loosely held the bottle. Once he was quiet, she could hear everything. She felt a little bad that she didn't talk to everyone about Parker; but there was absolutely no time. By the time Carson decided she was going, they already had to pick up *The Papercut Project* from the airport.

Nothing was going to change now that everyone knew she was coming. She still needed Satchel's help. Parker was crying more and more now, and Carson had no idea what was wrong. She couldn't handle him alone.

She didn't want to admit it, but she was a little scared. She didn't want anything to be wrong with Parker. Just when she was about to go out in the living room and explain to Nate *again* that she was coming on tour, Holland spoke up to defend her. Staring at the closed bedroom door, she smiled and held Parker a little tighter.

In the past two days, she felt like no one was on her side. Now, she had someone sticking up for her, explaining why Carson was coming along. Sure, Holland may not have known the full story, but Carson was still happy that Holland didn't mind arguing with Nate for her. Carson was getting so tired of fighting.

But she knew it wasn't over. Even though Holland defended her then didn't mean that Holland would always be on her side. Holland was a little unpredictable, especially when it came to Parker. No, the only person that she could guarantee to be on her side was herself. Nate was right: it wasn't going to be easy having a baby on the tour. Especially if you were his mother.